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My Soul's Cathedral & Other Poems

by James Henry MacLafferty

The Temple of Silence

Erected not by manly brawn nor skill,
By master-builder's art nor cunning hand;
No stiffened mortar binds thee with its band
Of clay and human blood; but in my will,
Yea, greater far, thy mystic portals fill
The regions of my soul, and ever stand
Ajar, to bid me enter in; expand
In endless growth, and every trust fulfil.

Ah!—here no sound—the silence o'er me steals,
I kneel to better look within my soul,
The altar draped with filmy gauze of dreams,
The pictured walls, mosaics of ideals;
While surging through my being is the roll
Of great desire as of an hundred streams.

My Soul's Cathedral & Other Poems

BY JAMES HENRY MACLAFFERTY

COME KNEEL WITH ME, MY COMRADE, FRIEND,
IN THIS CATHEDRAL AISLE,
AND LOOKING DEEP WITHIN THY HEART
FORGET THE WORLD THE WHILE;
AND IF, BENEATH THIS HALLOWED DOME,
A MESSAGE COME TO THEE,
THERE DOTH NOT SPEAK THE MAN I AM,
BUT HE I LONG TO BE.

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To My Father

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[1]

My Soul's Cathedral

My Soul's Cathedral—hallowed place—
So dark, so glorious, filled with grace,
  When e'er my Soul doth part thy veil,
And scent the incense as it burns,
  It kneels before the Holy Grail,
Its kingly king of sacred urns.

Then through vast arches' sacred gloom
It hears the diapason boom
  Of God's great organ's awful tone,
That bids its inward tumult cease—
  For Angels play, whom God has shown
His face, and giv'n eternal peace.

And one by one—like deep bells toll—
I feel receding from my Soul
  Its molten gods, and idols vain,
And in each vacant niche I know
  Is taking place, from out God's train,
One of His angel host . . . and so,

My prostrate Soul lifts up its eyes
And gazes into Paradise;
  Then goes again into the world,
A soul as pure as soul can be,
  And with a new-born strength out-hurled
Is evil . . . I have been with Thee.

God's Great Ocean

Let me linger near thy border,
  Let me blend my song in thine,
As the smallest song-bird's music
  Blends with organ, deep, divine.
    Ah! thy pealing
    Gently stealing
O'er my soul, dissolves my pride;
    And deep emotion,
    God's great ocean,
Whelms me, as beneath thy tide.

Rhythmic, resonant, resounding
  Like augmented pedal bass,
Thy vibration stirs my being,
  Lures my spirit into space;
    Clears my vision,
    Gives decision
In the battle of my life;
    Calms my spirit
    When I hear it,
Making peace of inward strife.

To the Columbia

Through the golden doors of morning,
  Flashing down the wondrous West;
Out the source of light and wisdom,
  Nourishing as mother's breast,
    Solemn, regnant,
    Making pregnant
Hillside, valley, fertile plain—
    Millions living
    By thy giving—
Seeking nothing back again.

Monarch crowned of mighty rivers,
  Peer of any flowing stream,
Surging 'twixt thy vast embankments,
  Pictured like the fairest dream;
    Gliding, slipping,
    Dashing, dipping,
Peaceful, calm, then torn in strife;
    Oft reflecting
    Storms projecting,
Like the mirror of my life.

Yea, as mortal's life I see thee,
  From thy source till in the sea,
Thou shalt rush thy mighty torrent,
  Struggling ever to be free.
    All thy length
    Receiving strength
From an hundred smaller streams;
    Faster speeding
    With their feeding,
Thy life like a mortal's seems.

As I have—thou hadst thy battle;
  One great test, surmounting all;
Fiercer, longer than the others,
  Where I stand and watch thee fall,
    Whirling, eddying,
    Struggling, steadying,
Through this Cascade Mountains' gorge;
    Never doubting,
    Cutting, flouting,
Glad in triumph, onward forge,

Mighty, pulsing, ceaseless river,
  In thy journey to the sea,
Where thy striving ends forever,
  . . . Mine will, in eternity.

[5]

Life's Paradoxes

Light out of darkness,
  Surcease from pain;
Joy out of sadness,
  Out of loss, gain.

Strength from our weakness,
  Rest from our care,
God recompenses
  For all that we bear.

The Light That Burns For Me

There may be no tears that my eyes can feel,
Yet grieving, my heart may the tears conceal,
And my soul as sad can be;
When moorings are loosened and cast aside,
And borne on the quiet resistless tide,
My ship puts out to sea.

There may be no sign nor an outward show
As sadly I gaze at the steady glow
Of the light that burns for me.
But sweeter my sadness for that clear light,
In mem'ry 'twill cheer me through every night
My ship is on the sea.

'Twill shine through the gloom with a steady gleam,
The star of my life and of every dream
I have of love, and Thee.
Then keep it, Dear Heart, so 'twill brightly burn,
To show me the haven as I return,
When my ship comes back from sea.

Mirror Land

You, who read these lines of mine,
Let me, too, your heart divine.
Let me feel its aches with you,
Let me share its pleasures, too.
Clasp your hand in mine the while,
Come, dear friend, and through the stile
We'll go together hand in hand
And wander in a mirror land.

We'll find reflected as we go,
Joys we've felt and griefs we know.
You will show me things that hid
From prying eyes, yet come unbid,
And here and there like spectres rise
To dim the azure of your skies.
I will be as candid, too,
In everything I show to you.
Perhaps, as through this land we go,
We'll find the things that grieve us so
Are phantoms, myths, and we shall feel
That only what we love is real.

We'll wander through the pleasant fields
Along a path where nature wields
In fairest mood, a mother's sway,
And nodding flowers bow the way.
We'll wander on through leafy grove
Where gentle forest creatures rove,
The land of rest, the land of dreams,
Where singing birds and babbling streams
Enchant the dreamer, as he lies
And gazes heavenward, through eyes
With lids half closed, and thoughts somewhere
Between forgetfulness and care.

And then, we'll go through forest dense,
Our progress slow, our muscles tense,
Where boulders, briers, fallen trees,
And greater obstacles than these
Defy our progress, say "turn back,"
For here there is no beaten track.
I fear we'll grieve and oft repine,
O gentle, trustful friend of mine,
But somehow we will hew the way
Through brush and trees to light of day.

And then we'll climb a mountainside;
With care, dear friend! the dangers hide
Below, above, in front, behind.
Some thoughtless absence of the mind
Might cause a stumble, then a fall;
Forgetting for the moment all
We've learned until the present time,
Might cost the effort of our climb;
And from a chasm of despair
Your voice and mine would fill the air.

On, up we'll go around the edge
Of many a rocky, jutting ledge;
And higher, higher as we go,
The more we'll lose the sight below
Of barriers that seemed so high,
But dwindle as we near the sky.

And we shall feel, as we ascend,
The growing strength our efforts lend;
For every triumph in the past
Will give us courage sure to last
Until we reach the mountain's crest,

And there, together, we will rest.
Then, gazing on a broader view,
Forget the things that I and you
Have in the past allowed to blind
The clearer vision of the mind;
And down the mountainside we'll roll
The weary burden of the soul.

[10]

A Grain of Mustard Seed

Thou essence of potentiality,
Thy lesson of Man's immortality,
    Hath girdled the earth
    And quickened the birth
Of strong and unwavering hope in me.

Thou smallest example for human creed,
Thou'rt least, thou'rt greatest, thou mustard seed;
    If faith such as thine
    Could only be mine,
From mountains of doubt would my life be freed.

Love Never Dies

Love never dies!
And when we say a love is dead,
Our language is a faulty thing.
If once Love lifts its timid head
In sweet-voiced melody to sing,
It never dies!

Love never dies!
True Love, an attribute of God,
Is like to Him and cannot end.
Who walks this way a path has trod,
Where joy with duty has a blend
That never dies.

Love never dies?
Then what of those who now are cold?
Yea, more, who hate, who once did love?
'Twas never love! A passion bold
Deceived the heart; born from above,
Love never dies!

The Meadow-Lark

Meadow-lark, sweet singer of the fields,
  Never do I hear thy joyous song,
But in my spirit every evil yields,
  And good resolves within me are made strong.
Thy soul, so brimming with tumultuous ecstasy,
Hath welded doubly strong the bond 'twixt thee
    and me.

Thou dost not choose the shaded leafy dell
  As if thou hadst a message for the few;
Nor, 'twixt four walls, as human voices tell
  Their praise of God to those within the pew;
But limited alone by thy creator's will,
Thy song doth saturate, doth satisfy and fill.

Thy body doth not lift thy song to height
  Attained by one akin to thee in name;
Nor can my praise give unto thee aright
  Thy due, as Shelley gave the other fame.
But upward, ever upward, borne without thy
    wing,
Thy song, 'twould seem, could make the dome of
    heaven ring.

Perhaps I love thee more, thou feathered voice,
  Because thy body, earth-bound like my own,
Must yet become as mine, which hath no choice
  But find its place in Mother Earth, alone.
And oh, my dearest, cherished wish shall ever be,
My song may bless some soul, as thy song blesses
    me.

[13]

Evil Pleasure

Weld not too strong the link between
  Thyself and gods of molten brass,
But keep the line of cleavage clean
  'Twixt joys that please or may harass.

An evil pleasure grows to be
  As heavy as a load of lead,
And when 'tis welded fast to thee
  Thy life is chained as to the dead.

Shasta

Shasta, men have sung of thee,
  Others will in coming days;
Ever, always thou shalt be
  A beacon in the mantling haze
Of doubt, that doth at times o'erspread
The path our feet anon may tread.

Creeping, toiling past thy base,
  Bent on purpose ill defined,
Men see thy unsullied face
  Teaching to discerning mind
A purpose fixed; of soul serene
Where doubt may never intervene.

Ah, many lessons thou dost teach
  As I behold thy towering form.
They bid my aspiration reach
  To'rd heaven, through the blinding storm;
That man, to build to height profound
Must delve to depth beneath the ground.

Might I but heed this one, today,
  Though all beside may pass unlearned,
Then, should I never disobey
  The law of love, or be concerned
Except to steadfast keep my vow
To build as firm, as fixed as thou.

Artist Infinite

Who painted the face of that flower?
  Who hung yonder orb in the sky,
And did in miraculous power
  My soul to my body ally?

'T was He, who thus makes me to ponder,
  To struggle, to strive and to yearn
For Paradise, beckoning yonder,
  And calling my soul to return.

Songs of Hawaii

O Dreamy Isle, I sit the while
And listen to thy songs.
My heart is sad, and yet is glad
Its love to thee belongs.

So far from thee I cannot see
Thy splendid, fronded palms,
Yet, as I hear thy mellow cheer,
I worship in thy psalms.

In memory's ken I am again
Upon the Pali's height;
And under me the land and sea,
A picture of delight.

I visions see of Waikiki,
The moonlight on the reef;
Its softness shed o'er Diamond Head,
. . . Forgotten is my grief.

Two Songs

For me the Skylark never sang
  Save soaring in the pages
Of Shelley, Wordsworth, Tennyson,
  To sing for all the ages.
But, ah, I've heard a Meadow-lark
  From hedges, fields and fences,
Pour on the air his song of joy,
  When rosy dawn commences.

His rounded, mellow, soulful song,
  Like full-sustained contralto,
Would blend in sweetest harmony,
  The treble with his alto,
If with the Skylark he could sing,
  Though never soaring high;
The one a love-song of the earth,
  The other of the sky.

The Life That Might Have Been

Lord of my life that might have been!
Lord of my life so filled with sin!
  Lord of my secret heart!
Grieving, I grieve for what is not;
Mourning, I mourn each hidden blot;
  Serving, I serve in part.

Buried within my life the while,
Deep in my heart may be the guile
  No mortal eye can see.
Nothing I do can ever hide,
Nothing can in my heart abide,
  Hidden, dear Lord, from Thee.

Lord of my life, my spirit yearns;
Quench not the smoking flax that burns
  Smothered in doubt and sin.
Strengthen my arm for valiant strife,
Strengthen my will, to make my life
  The Life that might have been.

Compensation

The greater struggle there may be,
The stronger barriers we meet—
The keener zest in victory,
The less the sorrow in defeat.

The greater patience under trial,
The easier our self-control—
The less our suffering the while
The billows of misfortune roll.

The darker be the night of pain,
The lonelier the vigil be—
The sweeter rest at morn we'll gain,
The friend we find, will truer be.

The more our need for earnest prayer,
The deeper anguish in the soul—
The greater joy to lose the care,
The surer God will make us whole.

Growth of the Soul

Climb from the depths of the valley's chill,
  Out of the shadows that lurk below,
Nurse at the breast of the throbbing hill,
  Grow in thy day as the tall trees grow.
This, Soul of Mine, be thy constant cry;
This, O my Soul, is to never die!

Whence camest thou? . . . Give it little thought!
  Whither? . . . Ah, let this concern thee more!
Into this state thou art blindly brought;
  Out of it see but an open door.
Once past the portal, perhaps 'twill be
Growth of today will have made thee free.

My Tyrant

A tyrant thou art grown to be,
  Ensnaring me in meshes deep;
Relentless art thou, Poesy,
  Commanding me that ere I sleep,
I yet must kneel before the shrine
I builded when I made thee mine.

I seek thee when I fain would rest;
  When foot-sore, weary, travel-stained.
I seek thee for I love thee best,
  And then, to prove the power gained,
If noon of day or noon of night,
I hear thee say, "I bid thee write!"

And oft I pleading, pray of thee
  To spare me till another time,
And promise then, sweet Poesy,
  To worship in poetic rhyme.
Thou unrelenting bidst me write,
And I've obeyed thee, now, Good Night!

The Ebb of the Tide

When after the flood comes the ebb of the tide
And I shall drift out to sea,
Past the headland so bare may I quietly glide
With a trust that will comfort me.

In the still afterglow, when the sunlight has shone
In a last ling'ring ray for me,
And my day run its course, may I feel He has known
And forgives my infirmity.

Past the buoy, that marks well the treacherous shoal,
Past the beacon that warns through the night,
Safe from breaker and rock, with a faith that is whole,
May I drift with my trust in His might.

For life's sun cannot set till the close of the day,
Though it often seems so in our pain;
And His wisdom is sure, be our fears what they may,
God garners no unripened grain.

THIS IS THE ENDING OF THE BOOK OF VERSE THE TITLE POEM OF WHICH IS MY SOUL'S CATHEDRAL BY JAMES HENRY MACLAFFERTY, DESIGNED AND EXECUTED BY J. H. NASH AT THE TOMOYE PRESS AND GIVEN TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH THE ENTERPRISE OF PAUL ELDER & COMPANY IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD NINETEEN HUNDRED & TEN IN THE CITY LOVED AROUND THE WORLD — SAN FRANCISCO

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